

## **Light of Love**

Love in the face of fear, love in the face of challenge, love in the face of discouragement, anger, hate and despair. Love is the sign of God with us even in the most challenging of seasons.

It's been another challenging Covid week for BC, and the stresses of it all seem to be hitting people a little deeper and it also seems that the presence of love seems a little thin when I look at the news these days. (Perhaps the news is not the right place to look for love neither is social media, so you might take a break from either of those if you are feeling covid fatigue without actually having covid). So many have forgotten that living in love for one another should be our first action. Even if you are not a Christian most people follow 'the golden rule.' WE know, be kind to one another, be loving... but what has happened?

This Sunday, when "love" is the Advent focus, our two passages speak to "signs" of God's presence and God's love, but also of God's challenge to get love right. Isaiah speaks to God's Love even in the face of political fear. The nation was so afraid that "their people shook as the trees of a forest shake when there is a wind." In scripture this is a symbol of a childlike fear. Children are often 'signs' in the Hebrew texts, something to pay attention to. That is what this whole season is based on. The 'sign' of a child here to provide love that will encompass the future generation, a future that includes Immanuel, "God with us."

Last week we read from the action-packed and brief Gospel of Mark. Mark is always quick to get to the story. Matthew however, is a bit more academic he writes for the literate crowd. Admittedly I cut this reading short because I felt sorry for poor Rosie reading an exhaustive list of names and for you the viewer I didn't want you to turn it off mid list because you got bored and lost in genealogy. If however, you are like me and you find this historic lineage connection intriguing I encourage you to go read that first chapter of Matthew on your own - there is some rich history there. Matthew's "origin story" of Christianity begins with a long genealogy because he wants to make sure we get it. He takes great care to mention the exile and Isaiah's time, in the midst of that history. Matthew wants us to recognize God with us through past struggles connecting to the present, and to the future. This child Jesus is the product of an historical lineup of generations and will be the sign that God is with us into the future trials as well. Right from the beginning of his life Jesus' father Joseph shows a radical act of love in a situation that gave him every reason to walk away. The messenger says, "don't be afraid to do the hard thing here... there's a big payoff for humanity in it."

These stories of our heritage remind us that the only way for there to be a future of growth is through love. Marica McFee says "The only way the future is cared for is to love it like a child. We must love the child, nurture the child—or, as we use the symbolic meaning—love the future,

nurture the future and that is done by being courageous enough to love differently, love fully, love in a way that nurtures all of humanity's future, not destroys it.”

There is so much opportunity for us to love. There always is but whether it is age and stage or the fact that we are in the midst of a pandemic or whether I'm just a little weary of all the upheaval in our world right now it feels like love is the only way for us to move this world forward in a positive light, now more than ever. Hugh Kerr reminded me the other day of a song I preached on a couple times many years ago. The Black Eyed Peas came out with their song “Where is the Love?” eleven years ago and it is just as relevant today as it was then. Let's take a moment to listen.

[https://ca.video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-domaindev-st\\_emea&hsimp=yhs-st\\_emea&hspart=domaindev&p=where+is+the+love#id=1&vid=3eea1696772cebaebc4fcd2f1e12d3ce&action=click](https://ca.video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-domaindev-st_emea&hsimp=yhs-st_emea&hspart=domaindev&p=where+is+the+love#id=1&vid=3eea1696772cebaebc4fcd2f1e12d3ce&action=click)

(Finish after first chorus - where is the love...)

Father, Father, Father help us  
Send some guidance from above  
'Cause people got me, got me questionin'  
Where is the love (Love)  
Where is the love, the love, the love

Feel free to listen to the whole song on your own time if you don't already know it. But that's the question of today. It is the question that should forever be drawn out of us. Why? Because the love is here, it is present in God's spirit, in the presence of God's spirit calling love out of us. No matter who it is we encounter stranger or friend, enemy or comrade love is the answer. No matter if the person is in our socio-economic status, race or gender, when you struggle or disagree, love is the answer. Love is the risk we have to take in the face of our fears and doubts.

Just think of the one we follow in our faith, Jesus born in humble circumstances, his seemingly “illegitimate” birth and humble beginnings could have, should have lifted up this message forever. Here is the love? What do we miss out on when we don't love first? When we judge too quickly, dismiss others too soon?

I wonder... how are you feeling on the judgemental scale these days? On a scale of one to 10 how often are you finding yourself judging people lately? Perhaps I ask this question because my judge-o-meter is breaking the scale some days lately.

Why? Because I've got it figured out:

- wear a mask
- don't travel
- don't expose others to your germs
- exercise at home if you need to work out (that's what I do)

- and Okay Mr. pastor that is so high and mighty that God has commanded for you to meet with your people every week when others of us have heard the opposite call - what kind of God do you follow anyway....

And then there are the other judgements I hear regularly from others:

- Stop protesting
- stop looting
- why are you living in such fear?
- why don't you have church?
- I don't want to follow these silly protocols they are just making life harder.
- those people don't understand,
- don't they know?

And these are just the focus problems of the last few months. The list goes on. I haven't even touched on the environment or worse yet the opioid crisis. Now there is a place where love's presence needs to be shown.

We are a divided, broken, desperate world and this holy presence wants to bring us together. Every one of those judgments I just stated makes sense. I hold true to many of them but how do I speak truth in love? Where is the love. When I'm wound up and anxious and angry and resentful it is worthless. I've had so many conversations with people in the last week about their stress and anxiety. If we were in person I might even ask you to raise your hand if you have felt stressed this week and I can almost guarantee most hands in the room would go up. Throughout Advent we always proclaim hope, love, joy, and peace in the midst of difficulty. This is forever the church's gift to the world. Our faith story is grounded in the presence of God that came and dwelt among us in the midst of hardship. Last week we lit the candle of hope. We talked about how Hope doesn't mean we have it figured out in fact hope speaks light into our real fears. Last Sunday we had an online children's church and when I asked what they hoped for this year it was different than any other year, it wasn't about a toy or a pony this year the first thing that a young child said was "I hope the corona virus will go away" and we all paused and agreed and I said "I hope that to..."

We live in hope so that we can keep going. "Hope Aligns with life." In a year when many of us feel like we have lost ourselves, hope shows up and reminds us that we are not alone, Emmanuel God is with us. Diane Stricklands says The first candle we light is the candle of hope "because it is the only candle that is strong enough to shine by itself in the darkness." Hope is what keeps us alive so that we can light the candle of love. The messengers call us to love in the midst of overwhelming challenge.

That is exactly what the carols of resistance teach us each week in this series. At the end of this worship you will hear once again the carol of resistance "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" written in 1849 by a Massachusetts Unitarian minister, Rev. Edmund Hamilton Sears. Sears served the Unitarian congregation in [Wayland](#), Massachusetts, before moving on to a larger congregation in [Lancaster](#). After seven years of hard work, he suffered a breakdown and returned

to Wayland. He wrote *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear* while serving as a part-time preacher in Wayland. Writing during a period of personal melancholy, and with news of revolution in Europe and the United States' war with Mexico fresh in his mind, Sears portrayed the world as dark, full of "sin and strife", and not hearing the Christmas message.

Sears' song doesn't focus on Bethlehem, but it focus' on his own time, and on the sissue of war and peace. Written in 1849, it has long been assumed to be Sears' response to the just ended [Mexican–American War](#). One verse has been left out of several hymnals over the decades but it has been restored in Voices United and a few other hymnals. This verse refers to the love-song of the angels being drowned out by our warring nature:

*Yet with the woes of sin and strife  
the world has suffered long;  
beneath the angel-strain have rolled  
two thousand years of wrong;  
and warring humankind hears not  
the love-song which they bring;  
O hush the noise and cease the strife,  
and hear the angels sing.*

This week in the midst of it all I want to invite you to listen to the angel chorus and then join it, raising your voices with the message that love, not hate, is the answer. God's love will conquer all that is hard, Don't be afraid God's love is stronger.  
Let us sing.